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One in Five UK Adults Change Social Habits Around GLP-1 Users, Study Finds

The research suggests the spillover reaches far beyond patients, with friends drinking less, ordering less food, choosing fewer food-centered outings

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A significant share of adults in the UK are changing how they drink, eat and socialize because they know someone taking GLP-1 weight-loss medication, even though they have never used the drugs themselves, according to new research from market research firm Escalent.

Escalent said these people, whom it calls “echo consumers,” could make up as many as one in five UK adults. The study found that in the UK they outnumber GLP-1 users by 2.2 to one, suggesting that the social effects of the medicines may reach far beyond the people who take them.

The findings point to changes that include lower alcohol consumption and fewer social occasions centered on food and drink. Among UK echo consumers whose shared occasions have changed, 26% said they are drinking less themselves and 17% said they go out for drinks less often with the person they know who uses a GLP-1 drug. Another 7% said they now bring different drinks to gatherings.

The changes extend beyond alcohol. Escalent said 35% of those surveyed order less food when eating out with a GLP-1 user, while 27% choose activities that are not centered on eating or drinking. The report also found that 36% buy fewer snacks and treats for gatherings, 21% bring different food to those occasions and 24% choose different gifts for people they know who are using the medications.

The study was based on surveys of 1,602 adults in the UK and 1,349 in the United States. Escalent said the pattern reflects the influence of friends, co-workers and broader social circles in reshaping consumer behavior, not just the direct effects of the medications on the people taking them.

Melissa Bane, Escalent’s managing director for Europe, said much of the business response so far has focused on GLP-1 users themselves. But she said that may be too narrow a view if social groups begin changing their own habits around them, especially during the Christmas season, when spending on treats, alcohol and gift items typically rises.

That wider spillover could matter for the drinks industry if reduced alcohol demand spreads from users of the drugs to the people around them. For wine, beer and spirits producers, as well as supermarkets, pubs, bars and restaurants, the risk is that lower spending would not be limited to a relatively small patient group but could show up across group gatherings, gift buying and nights out.

The report adds to a growing body of evidence that GLP-1 medications are affecting food and beverage consumption. Harpers reported in March that use of the drugs had been linked to a 22% drop in spending on drinks for home consumption and a 30% drop in spending in bars, restaurants and other on-premise venues while users were taking the medication.

Escalent’s new research suggests the secondary effect may now deserve similar attention. Rather than simply changing what patients buy for themselves, the medications may also be changing what friends and family members bring to parties, how often they meet for drinks and what kinds of social activities they choose.

Bane said some items long associated with Christmas gatherings, including chocolates, alcohol, festive hampers and after-dinner mints, could be left off the menu for millions of people who have never taken the drugs. She said consumer brands, retailers and restaurants will need to reconsider how they respond to shifting expectations around indulgence, celebration and shared experiences as those changes move through social networks and influence a broader group of shoppers.